

THE  
COMMON SCHOOL JOURNAL.

VOL. IX.

BOSTON, APRIL 15, 1847.

No. 8.

TENTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SECRETARY OF THE BOARD  
OF EDUCATION.

[Continued from page 112.]

THE other consideration above referred to is derived from a comparison of the average length of the schools at the two periods mentioned, — namely, in 1837, and in 1845-6. During this period, the average length of the schools has increased *fifteen* per cent.; — that is, for every hundred days of school privileges then afforded to the children, they now have a hundred and fifteen days. Now, it is apparent that the first natural consequence of increasing the length of a school would be to diminish the average of attendance; because those unwise parents who grudge to their children even the time occupied by a short school, would feel still greater discontent at their attending a long one. If the selfishness or cupidity of a parent or master persuades him that he cannot spare the services of his child for a hundred days, still greater would be his repugnance to spare them for a hundred and fifteen. Yet, notwithstanding these impediments, we do find that the number of children in attendance is strikingly increased, and that the average attendance of this increased number, even during the last unfortunate year, is also a little increased.

I might refer, in this connection, to another unquestionable fact, though its precise value, as an item of evidence bearing upon this point, cannot be ascertained. Since 1838, Registers showing both the attendance and the average attendance of the scholars have been kept in the schools. Previous to 1838, the law provided for no such registration, and in but few of our Public Schools were registers kept. The returns anterior to 1838, both in regard to the whole number of scholars in attendance, and to their average attendance, were to a considerable degree conjectural; and there is abundant evidence to prove that these conjectural estimates were almost invariably too high. It will be recollected by all, that when the number of our children who were either permanently or occasionally

absent from school, was first made known, from the authentic evidence of the registers, it struck the whole community with astonishment. This shows that both teachers and committee men, being possessed of no exact data by which to determine the amount of attendance, had yielded to the very natural desire of making a favorable report, and had maintained the reputation of their respective towns by over-estimating the numbers in attendance.\*

But though the *relative* attendance of our children upon school may be improving, the *absolute* attendance is still deplorably low, as the following facts will demonstrate:—

Deducting 12,000 children, between the ages of 4 and 16, as the estimated number of those who attend academies and private schools, and who do not depend at all for their education upon Common Schools, there will still remain 191,877, between those ages, who are wholly or mainly dependent for their education upon the last-named schools. The whole number who were, for any portion of the time, last year, connected with our summer schools, was 153,459; and the whole number connected with our winter schools was 174,270. But of these, 6018 were below the age of 4 years, and 11,589 were above the age of 16 years. Deducting those under 4 from the summer schools, and those over 16 from the winter schools, (because those under 4 rarely attend in winter, and those over 16 as rarely in summer,) and it will show the whole number, between 4 and 16, who attended school during any part of the summer term to be only 147,441, and the whole number between the same ages, who attended school during any part of the winter term, to be 162,681. It thus appears that 44,436 children, between 4 and 16, wholly dependent upon Common Schools for their education, were not found in those schools at all during the summer term; and that 29,196, of the same class of children, were not found there at all during the winter term. The absentees in summer were nearly four and a half nineteenthths, or almost one quarter; and in winter, they were almost three nineteenthths, or considerably more than one in seven. Is it not a fearful thing to contemplate that so large a portion of our children passed through the last year without the advantages of any school, public or private? Is not patriotism dormant amongst a people who tolerate an evil, which, if permitted to continue, is sure to undermine the government? What would be said, if we saw a large portion of our fellow-citizens treasonably engaged in subverting the foundations of

\* In a French romance, two persons are represented as sitting down to prepare a statement of the population and resources of France. After concluding that the number of the French people amounted to twenty-five millions, one of them says, "Let us call it thirty millions; we cannot do too much for our country!" Some of the school committees were animated by the same patriotic spirit.

the republic, and bringing in anarchy or despotism? Yet, so far as the terribleness of the result is concerned, they might as well *do* this, as *permit* it. The tolerance or supineness which will not avert an evil, is as fatal to the victim as the wickedness which perpetrates it.

And where is the consistency of that philanthropy which expends all its succors upon objects a thousand miles distant, while it is forgetful of the poverty and wretchedness which grow up luxuriantly around its own door? or where the all-embracing spirit of that Christianity, which, while it stretches abroad its arms to rescue the heathen of distant climes, is indifferent to the condition of those of their own kindred and tongue who are rapidly coming upon the stage of life in a state of practical heathenism? No chains were ever fastened by the most tyrannous master upon the vilest serf that ever crouched at his feet, so cruel as the bondage to depraved and unchastened passions, or so terrible as the fears which superstition inflicts upon the ignorant. Lamentable as it may be, that any idolater in the far off islands of the sea should bow himself down to the worship of false gods,—and who would relax any effort or withhold any means to ransom his soul from this perdition?—yet is it not to be lamented with a far deeper lamentation, that, in despite of the atmosphere of knowledge which surrounds him, and the light of the gospel which burns before him, any worshipper of gold, or of power, or of any other “god of this world” should be suffered, by our neglect, to grow up amongst us?

But the worst aspect of this evil of non-attendance has not yet been presented. The average length of all the Public Schools in the State, last year, was two or three days less than eight months. On the supposition, then, that every child, whose name was entered upon the register, attended punctually and constantly, the entire attendance would be less than two thirds of the year. But though the number of scholars whose names were found upon the register, during the summer of 1845-6, was 153,459, yet the absentees were so numerous as to reduce the average of attendance to 110,108;—that is, the average absence for that summer, even of those who belonged to the schools, was more than four fifteenths, or considerably more than one quarter. And though the whole number of children whose names appeared upon the register during the winter of the same year was 174,270, yet the absences reduced this number to an average attendance of 128,084, which also shows that the children who belonged to the school were absent, on an average, more than one quarter of the time. Thus, after reducing our number by subtracting those who did not attend at all, we must still reduce it more than one quarter more on account of irregularity in attendance. No relief is gained by saying that some were

absent less than this proportion of the time, because, if some were absent less, others, by just so much, were absent more.

The above statistics and general views are principally derived from the Returns and Reports of the school committees. In the tables at the end of the Abstract, the statistics will all be found, arranged and consolidated. The residue of the book is a compilation, embracing the more essential parts of the committees' reports.

For the preparation of the Abstract, I have carefully read the whole of the committees' reports for the last two years. Having acquainted myself with the contents of each report, I have then made such selections from it, for publication, as the limits of the contemplated volume would allow. In making the selections, those portions have been taken which seemed to give the most just, useful, and favorite views of their respective authors;—such, so far as I could judge, as they themselves would have indicated, had it been practicable to submit the choice to them.

When it is considered that the reports were equivalent to more than six thousand letter-paper pages of closely-written manuscript, it will be at once perceived that the compilation from them, large as it is, embraces only a small proportion of their contents. Much more of useful and interesting matter might have been selected; but if teachers, committee men, and parents will follow the wise counsels and imbue themselves with the elevated spirit of the volume, as it is, they will find their educational knowledge greatly increased, and their hearts rekindled with zeal in this sacred cause. After having read pretty extensively the leading official documents of an educational nature, which have emanated from other states and countries, I have no hesitation in saying that I have found no others superior, perhaps none even equal, to these. The teacher, or the school committee man, who leaves this volume unread, will voluntarily pass by one of the most efficient means of qualifying himself for the discharge of his duties.

It needs no argument to show that the reading of the reports and the preparation of the Abstract must be a work of great labor. The part compiled, this year, from the committees' reports alone, consists of three hundred and twenty-three very large octavo pages, printed in fine type. The index is no inconsiderable addition to the work. The tables were prepared, as heretofore, in the office of the Secretary of State; but it is impossible for the most expert and accomplished clerk, if unacquainted with the size and population of the towns, and the general condition of their respective schools, not to fall into such egregious errors as would wholly invalidate the authority of the work. Hence, though no part of my official duty, yet, with the exception of one year when I was out of the country, I have always revised the tables, by a comparison of them with



the original documents, from which they were formed, and have recast a considerable portion at least of their computations ; and have thus been able, from my particular knowledge of the condition of the respective towns and schools, to rectify such errors as would otherwise have cancelled the whole value of the work. When it is further considered that this labor must, on account of other engagements, be executed during the few summer months, it is obvious that the office of any one who performs it can be no sinecure.

But the work, though an arduous, has been a most delightful one. It has combined more than the common dignity of history with more than the common interest of romance. Other works of a kindred nature may invigorate and sharpen the intellect ; this awakens all the sympathies of the human heart. In a great majority of the committees' reports, a particular account has been given of each school in the town ; — its prosperous or its adverse fortunes, its happy or its pernicious results. The reports, in connection with the returns, have shown the number of the children belonging to the town who attended school, and the number of those who did not attend. They have shown the degree of regularity in the attendance of those whose names were enrolled on the register, and therefore the amount of time and of opportunities lost by irregular attendance. From the same authentic sources, it has appeared that some schools have made honorable proficiency ; while others, through the incompetency of teachers or some other equally overwhelming calamity, have actually gone backwards, and have had whatever knowledge the scholars may have possessed at the beginning of the school, obliterated or mystified before its close. Some schools have endued themselves with the ornament of good manners ; — order has been enthroned, decorum cultivated, purity nourished ; others have been distinguished for rudeness, boisterousness, vulgarity, and a practical contempt of all the courtesies and amenities of life. In some schools, a high sense of honor has been developed ; manliness, frankness, generosity, and an affectionate and fraternal spirit have characterized the schoolroom and presided in the play-ground ; in others, there has been a perpetual attempt to circumvent the teacher, a false and hateful pride and rivalry in disobeying commands, and in evading the salutary rules of the school ; obscenity in conversation between the sexes, profane swearing, lying, and sometimes, though very rarely, theft ! On an average, the schools have consisted of about fifty children each. As the reports of the committees introduced one school after another, and graphically set forth their excellences or their defects, their beauty or their deformity, it would be impossible for any intelligent reader not to fancy himself an actual spectator of the scene. The school, with life-like features, and glowing in the vivid colors of reality, would rise

before his imagination at once. Surrendering himself to the guidance of the descriptive page, he would be borne along from house to house and from town to town. He would visit each edifice devoted to this sacred cause, and rejoice in its appliances for instruction, or mourn over its impediments to progress. Sometimes he would behold successive groups of children,—the treasures of a thousand homes,—with their radiant and happy countenances; orderly, quiet, studious;—a sight to make glad the bleakest day that ever winter and storm united to send upon the earth; and sometimes he would be introduced to a company made up of cravens and rebels,—miniature criminals in a miniature prison, but daily receiving and practising such lessons as will rapidly mature them into adult felons, and consign them to the granite cells and iron-bound doors of the penitentiary. He would see teachers whose faces were beaming with kind looks, as palpable as a zephyr, and as bland; or those whose countenances were frowning with a cold severity, under which the blood would congeal though the eyes were blind. He would hear recitations, sometimes thorough and prompt; sometimes dull and stupid; sometimes signalized by envy and a low ambition for display. He would witness the intercourse and the discipline by which conscience is developed or dwarfed. And, finally, at the end of the school, and as the in-gathering of its harvest, he would see knowledge, kindness, good manners, and good principles,—each child possessing a greater power to do good and a stronger desire to use that power; or, on the other hand, he would see each dissocial, ungenial, irreverent propensity or passion of the human heart stimulated and strengthened, and made ready to issue forth on an errand of mischief. Not either of these extremes might be found to pervade and monopolize any one school to the entire exclusion of its opposite; but the good and the evil, however variously mingled, would be seen to have a practical existence. Thus school after school would rise up before the mind of the reader, and, with all the vividness of a dramatic representation, be seen to enact its part. As one group of fifty or a hundred children left the stage, another would ascend it. In few and brief words would their fortunes be told, but in words of more sententious and impressive eloquence than orator ever uttered. The labors and results of three or four months, crowded in the recital into as many minutes or lines; the fate of the children, for an integral portion of their school-going life, irrevocably decided; the abiding influences infixed in character, and more than prognostic of future weal or woe;—the opportunity, the probation, and the sentence,—all these would be seen and heard in quick succession and with ever-deepening effect. In reading thus, by the hour and by the day, the imagination becomes intensely excited. As the history of another and still another school

takes its turn, the heart anxiously asks what shall be its fate. It becomes painfully alive to the first intimation of the good or the ill which is to affect, perhaps to decide, the fortunes of so many of the young. Solicitude deepens, and the breath is unconsciously held, until the truth is revealed, that another group of immortal natures has moved forward in the path of intelligence and rectitude, or has been sped onwards towards the pit of ignorance and vice.

This, indeed, is no mimic scene. No fiction is played upon this stage. The actors are real; the representation is true; — not life-like merely, but life itself. The performers, — not a few, but hundreds of thousands in number, — are enacting their own parts, in the great drama of existence; and, even if we look no further than this world, the catastrophe is to be the glory or the perdition of individuals and of nations.

In all countries and times, it has been an impulse, if not an instinct of the human mind, to long for a knowledge of the future, — to desire to lift the curtain that hides coming events from our eyes. To obtain prescience of future fortunes, whether individual or national, men have vainly watched the flight of birds as they obeyed the great law of their migrations; they have laid open and examined the entrails of animals; they have traced the courses and the conjunctions of the stars; they have pretended to evoke the dead, and to wring from them the secrets which time holds in its bosom, and they have put the gods themselves to the question, to make them foretell the fate they had foredoomed. Hence numerous orders of men have been set apart to the work of divination and prophecy, — the necromancer, the soothsayer, the augur, the astrologer. Hence patriots have wrestled with destiny to insure the salvation of their country; and priests have supplicated Heaven to vouchsafe those temporal blessings which they were doing so little to obtain. Yet the solution of this awful mystery of the future lay before them, like an open book, while they were searching afar off, — looking among the silent stars and questioning the unanswering dead, — to find it. It lay in the agencies for good or for evil, which were forming the minds and hearts of the rising generation around them.

In our country and time, one of the most effective of these agencies is our Common Schools; and false seers and false prophets are they all, who pretend to foretell the destinies of the city or of its inhabitants, of men or of the nation, who do not first seek the responses of this true oracle.

#### TEACHERS' INSTITUTES.

In pursuance of the liberal provisions, made by the Legislature, at its last session, for Teachers' Institutes, six of those interesting meetings have been held. Owing to the lateness

of the day when the act was passed, it was found impossible to hold any Institute before the time usually assigned for opening the summer schools. The six, therefore, which have been held, were all held during the long vacation which intervenes between the summer and winter schools. As the Institutes were required by law to remain in session for a period not less than ten working days, and as a day must be allowed both for going and returning, each one would take a fortnight. Six Institutes, then, successively and continuously held, would occupy three months, which, being a longer period of time than intervenes between the summer and winter schools, it was found necessary to overlap them; — to begin a second Institute before the previous one had closed. I attended all of them in person, and spent as much time at each as this unavoidable arrangement would allow. The aggregate number of members was between four and five hundred. As a very general rule, the members appeared deeply interested in their work, and laudably anxious to reach a higher degree of fitness for their arduous and responsible office.

More females than males attended. This was true of each of the Institutes.

No special measures were adopted in order to institute a comparison between the sexes, as to their relative attainments. In orthography, however, on comparing the number of words misspelt by the young men and the young women, — the words put out to both being the same, — it was found that the errors of the former were about thirty-three per cent. more than of the latter.

One advantage of the Institutes, which, so far as I know, was not anticipated by any one, but which has been beautifully exemplified in practice, is the means which they afford for introducing singing into our schools. An instructor in vocal music has attended all the meetings, and has been able, in the majority of cases, to impart such a degree of rudimentary knowledge as will enable its recipients to introduce vocal music, or rote-singing, into their schools. Opportunities are thus afforded for supplying a great and long-neglected defect.

The general course of instruction and management was substantially the same as that pursued last year, and detailed in my Ninth Annual Report. Repetition is unnecessary.

Having attended each of the Institutes, and taken an active part in their instruction, it hardly becomes me to speak in full of the benefits which that instruction may have afforded. Other instructors, however, were engaged with me, and, in my absence, the general management of the Institutes was left in their hands; and I may therefore say, that the collective expressions of opinion made by the members at the close of their several meetings, and the private declarations of those whom I have since seen or heard from, give evidence of highly satisfac-



tory results. From no *member* of the Institutes, either during the time of their session or since, have I heard a word of complaint. To escape all animadversion, from all sources, in a world where so many conflicting opinions exist, is an object which no rational being proposes to himself. The most that can be done, even by the wisest, is to keep themselves undeserving of censure.

#### STATE NORMAL SCHOOLS.

The establishment of these institutions on what now seems to be a permanent basis, is the crowning labor of the year. No department of our extensive educational system gives so favorable auguries of its ultimate success. All else might prosper, but without the beneficent agency of this, the highest point of attainable excellence can never be reached. The experience of other countries, and of our own, has demonstrated that no adequate supply of well-qualified teachers for Common Schools can ever be had, without institutions specially set apart and devoted to the single object of preparing them. This great fact has been proved in two opposite ways, each of which is conclusive. The demonstration has been both negative and affirmative.

For two hundred years, Common Schools have existed in Massachusetts. During the whole of this period, we have had a flourishing and justly-renowned university; and, for the latter part of it, other universities or colleges have risen up amongst us. During the last fifty years, also, numerous and well-endowed academies have been called into existence. These universities, colleges, and academies have done almost all that has been done towards elevating and sustaining the standard of Common School education amongst us. They have had the opportunity and the power to do all that such institutions ever can do, towards the creation of a high order of teachers for our Common Schools. But after all these opportunities and powers, existing and operating through so long a period of years, there is no other topic in the vast range of questions submitted to the community for its decision, on which there exists so nearly a unanimous opinion, as that our teachers, as a class, have been, and still are, unequal to the discharge of the momentous duties assigned them. The higher institutions have provided nobly for the professions, and liberally, too, for the different departments of educated labor; but, even after the lapse of two centuries, it is found that they have not provided an order of men sufficiently numerous and sufficiently competent for the education of the masses, — of those who, though unobtrusive as individuals, are still, as a class, by far the most important in the body politic; and whose prosperity or adversity makes up the general weal or woe of mankind. All intelligent teachers themselves acknowledge

this; those who have been teachers affirm it; and all parents who have any adequate idea of what education is, have mourned over it inconsolably.

From time to time, indeed, there have been a few splendid exceptions to this general rule; for nature occasionally creates a genius whose high mission it is to overcome obstacles before deemed insurmountable, and to lead the race forward another stage in the career of improvement.

In all the states and countries, whose experience on this subject has been the same as our own, the result, too, has been the same. In some parts of Europe, Common Schools were coëval with the Protestant Reformation; but the experiment there, though even more protracted than our own, has had the same gloomy termination.

All these trials, made upon the grandest scale, hopefully prolonged through centuries, but uniformly eventuating in failure, constitute a negative proof of the strongest kind, demonstrating the necessity of institutions for the special preparation of teachers. It belongs to that kind of proof, which the geometers call the *reductio ad absurdum*,—the proving of a position by proving the absurdity of whatever contradicts it. Unhappily, the elements of the absurdity, in this case, are moral, and not geometrical. The resulting errors do not relate to physical magnitude and proportion, but to spiritual qualities,—to honor, veracity, justice, benevolence, love to man and love to God;—for the history of man has been, to a great extent, a history of sin and suffering, because childhood has not received a more enlightened and Christian guidance.

The same proposition,—the necessity of special means for qualifying teachers,—has been demonstrated affirmatively. In those countries where seminaries for teachers, or Normal Schools, have existed longest, and been administered with most efficiency, the schools are the best. This agency has done more than all other things to improve them; it has improved them, indeed, in spite of all adverse agencies; and just in proportion to the extent of the sphere it has filled and the energy with which it has been worked, have the science and the art of teaching advanced. For education, it is the one thing needful.

During the season just closed, a habitation and an abiding place have been given to two of our State Normal Schools. The liberality of individuals, aided by the bounty of the State, has done this beneficent work. The other school was already provided for. At the present time, therefore, we have three Normal Schoolhouses, for our three Normal Schools, all of them convenient and spacious; and the two recently erected, though not costly, are among the finest specimens of schoolhouse architecture in the world. Taking these schools together, they have never before had so prosperous a year.

One of them has been filled to its utmost capacity, and the attendance at the other two is increasing. They have a great work to perform, which, as yet, they have but just begun. They are to subdue all opposition, not by authority nor by force, but by the resistless persuasion of good works. They are to send forth missionaries who shall imitate the Savior, by going about "*doing good*."

Shortly after the publication of my last Annual Report, which communicated the fact that the Hon. Judge Davis had presented a copy of the London Encyclopædia to the Bridge-water Normal School, I received a letter from the Hon. Jonathan Phillips, offering the latest, and a most beautiful edition of the Encyclopædia Britannica to the West Newton Normal School. This was a most acceptable and valuable present, and has been most gratefully received. The Westfield Normal School is now the only one destitute of such a great treasure-house of information, to which any one can go and get knowledge for the asking. But I feel a confidence that such a work will soon be given to that school, by some of those generous benefactors amongst us, whose left hand does not know what their right hand doeth, and who therefore keep giving with both hands at the same time ; — an order of unpatented nobility, of whom Massachusetts can boast a larger share than any other part of the world ; — men who can be the possessors of wealth without being the votaries of avarice, and who form illustrious exceptions to the common rule, that the heart shrinks as the purse swells. The liberalizing influences of education alone can diminish the number of those men of whom it may be said, that the most unconsumable coffers in which they hoard their silver and gold, the iron fastenings which no strength can break, the locks which no ingenuity can pick, and the keys which no forger can imitate, are their own sordid dispositions.

#### STATE SCHOOL FUND.

On the 1st day of December, 1845, the capital of the School Fund amounted to \$789,389 55. Notwithstanding the extraordinary demands made upon it during the last year, — \$5,000 for the State Normal Schoolhouses, and \$1,104 39 for Teachers' Institutes, — it had increased, on the 1st of December inst., to \$821,572 31, — an addition, in a year of uncommon drafts upon its resources, of \$32,182 76. The good which this fund has done, which it is now doing, and the still greater good which it promises to do, is a perpetual illustration of the far-seeing wisdom and benevolence of those who established it. Happy men are they who planted the seeds, whose blossoming and fruitage are perennial !

The sum of \$360 was drawn from the treasury last year for the purchase of *District School Libraries*.

HAVING now summarily brought together the results of the last year's proceedings, I propose to give, as the principal topic of this report, some account of

THE MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOL SYSTEM.

I trust the propriety of selecting this topic, at the present time, will be apparent from the following considerations:—

In different parts of our Union, many intelligent and patriotic men are earnestly considering the subject of Popular Education, with a view to the adoption of a Free School System, as a part of the fundamental law of their respective States. Massachusetts, from the earliest days of its colonial existence, having had practical acquaintance with such a system, it is natural that other States should look to *her* course for principles and precedents, by which to guide their own. Hence, for years past, scarcely a week has gone by, — and sometimes, for weeks together, scarcely a day, — in which I have not received applications for information respecting our school system, — its organization, its administration, its cost, its means of support, the course, arrangement, and extent of its studies, &c., &c. Nor do these inquiries come from our sister States only; they come also from foreign provinces upon our borders, and from different nations in Europe.\* But nowhere, in a compact or a continuous form, is an account of our system to be found. Our school laws, though codified in 1835, are now scattered through a dozen volumes of statutes. The reports made by the Board of Education to the Legislature, have been distributed as soon as printed, and they have never been for sale. Though annually reprinted in the Common School Journal, yet that periodical is now just completing its eighth volume. I have had no other resource, therefore, than to answer, by letter, these incessant inquiries, giving, in each case, as full and precise a reply as was practicable. This part of my official, or rather extra-official, duty has become enormous; and yet it is apparent that a letter of any moderate length can give but the most meagre outline of the structure of our system, its administration and practical working. Any thing beyond a sketch would swell to the size of an essay. It has been asked, indeed, why a circular could not be prepared, in order to meet these exigencies; but it is obvious that a circular, embracing an answer to the various questions proposed, must be as specific and detailed as the account itself, which I now propose to give.

Another consideration, evincing the expediency of drawing up a somewhat minute and methodical account of our school

\* Not long since, I received, *on the same day*, letters from Nova Scotia, from Virginia, and from Wisconsin, each requesting such a detailed view of our system, as would be a guide to them, in legislating upon the subject.



system, arises from the fact, that many of our own people, and not a few even of our school officers, seem not to be very familiar with certain requirements of the law which enjoin important duties upon them, — duties the performance of which is the only title to valuable privileges. Perhaps an occasional ignorance of statutory requirements ought not to excite much surprise. The language of the law is formal, and, in some instances, technical. Antecedent provisions have sometimes been enlarged and sometimes narrowed by amendatory enactments; and it is not always easy to determine how far the old has been superseded or modified by the new. No inconsiderable portion of the committees, annually elevated to this office, are men who are elected to it for the first time; and many of them have had but a brief experience of its duties. But whatever may be the cause, the fact is certain, that applications for information, in regard to their relative rights and duties, from teachers, from school committees, and other persons affected by their proceedings, are incessant. This class of correspondence, like that before adverted to, has become exceedingly voluminous; and were it not that the great subject of which it treats is one of surpassing interest and attractiveness, it would be wholly intolerable.\* It has seemed to me, therefore, that an account of our school system, drawn up in popular language, abbreviating the occasional prolixity of the law, explaining what may not be perspicuous, and methodizing, under appropriate heads, its disjointed and scattered provisions, might not be without benefit to that meritorious class of officers who are intrusted with its administration, and to those directly affected by their official proceedings.

Another important consideration suggests itself. I do not know that there exists any where in Christendom, any account, at once methodical, succinct, and adapted to popular comprehension, of the school system of any state or nation, which was prepared within the state or nation itself, by a person familiar with its design, its structure, and its practical operation. Prussia sent to Scotland to study the features of the parochial school system established in the latter country. France sent one of the ablest of all her great men to Prussia and to Holland, to master the details of their elaborate systems. The reports made by M. Cousin, after visiting the last-named countries, were translated into English; they have been extensively read in Great Britain and in the United States, and they have been of great service in giving an impulse to the cause in this country. For different purposes, travellers have described the school system of Massachusetts, for the English

\* Besides being called upon to write official or semi-official letters, — frequently amounting to twenty or thirty pages a day, — I am supposed by many persons to keep a kind of gratuitous broker's office, at which teachers in the neighboring States may apply for such Massachusetts schools as pay large salaries.

and Scotch public. Governors, legislators, and others, in many of the Southern and Western States, have attempted to set forth the systems of New England and New York ; but I repeat that, so far as I know, no individual, of any nation or country, has ever given a description, at once succinct, comprehensive, and popular, of the entire school system under which he lives, and with which he will, of course, be most familiar. Error, more or less extensive and injurious, must necessarily be incorporated into every account given by a foreign pen. No observation, however discerning, or sagacity, however profound, can, without the rectifications of experience, assign to each part of so complicated a machine its exact place ; apporportion to each its relative importance, or declare the precise results to which their combined movements will lead. In fine, no man can see in an abstract principle all the results that use or practice will evolve from it. Observation and experience must compensate for the defects of insight and reason.

In order to escape the sources of error above indicated, and to insure information, at once the most correct and authentic, is it not very desirable that every community, which enjoys a school system at all worthy of the attention of an enlightened inquirer, should cause its history and condition to be written out for the benefit of its contemporaries ? If the Ministers of Public Instruction, in Prussia and Saxony, and France and Holland, would give to the world a detailed account of their school laws, and the leading decisions of the courts upon them, together with their administrative policy, and the supposed excellences and defects belonging to each ; if the superintendents of Common Schools, in New York, in Rhode Island, in Vermont, in Ohio, in Michigan, in Pennsylvania, in New Jersey, or wherever else such an officer exists, would do the same ; doubtless a body of documents would be prepared from which a system could be compiled vastly superior to any which now exists. The States now ignobly lagging in the rear of this great enterprise would be signally benefited by the experience of the more advanced, and even the foremost and the most experienced States might derive important hints and suggestions from their younger allies. So far as Massachusetts is concerned, the present report will be an attempt to supply her contribution to so desirable a work ; and I cannot refrain from the expression of an earnest hope, that this example will be imitated, until we shall have from every enlightened country in Christendom, and from some person belonging to it and well qualified for the task, a perspicuous, easily understood, and comprehensive account of its existing system for the education of its people. Three years would be sufficient for preparing a complete repertory of all the educational systems in Christendom.

It did not at all enter into my present purpose as a motive,

and yet it is a fact not unworthy of remark, that the present year completes the second century since the Free Schools of Massachusetts were first established. In 1647, when a few scattered and feeble settlements, almost buried in the depths of the forest, were all that constituted the colony of Massachusetts; when the entire population consisted of twenty-one thousand souls; when the external means of the people were small, their dwellings humble, and their raiment and subsistence scanty and homely; when the whole valuation of all the colonial estates, both public and private, would hardly equal the inventory of many a private individual at the present day; when the fierce eye of the savage was nightly seen glaring from the edge of the surrounding wilderness, and no defence or succor was at hand; it was then, amid all these privations and dangers, that the Pilgrim Fathers conceived the magnificent idea of a Free and Universal Education for the People; and, amid all their poverty, they stinted themselves to a still scantier pittance; amid all their toils, they imposed upon themselves still more burdensome labors; amid all their perils, they braved still greater dangers, that they might find the time and the means to reduce their grand conception to practice. Two divine ideas filled their great hearts, — their duty to God and to posterity. For the one, they built the church; for the other, they opened the school. Religion and Knowledge! — two attributes of the same glorious and eternal truth, — and that truth, the only one on which immortal or mortal happiness can be securely founded.

As an innovation upon all preëxisting policy and usages, the establishment of Free Schools was the boldest ever promulgated, since the commencement of the Christian era. As a theory, it could have been refuted and silenced by a more formidable array of argument and experience than was ever marshalled against any other opinion of human origin. But time has ratified its soundness. Two centuries now proclaim it to be as wise as it was courageous, as beneficent as it was disinterested. It was one of those grand mental and moral experiments whose effects cannot be determined in a single generation. But now, according to the manner in which human life is computed, we are the sixth generation from its founders; and have we not reason to be grateful both to God and man for its unnumbered blessings? The sincerity of our gratitude must be tested by our efforts to perpetuate and improve what they established. The gratitude of the lips only is an unholy offering.

In surveying our vast country, — the rich savannas of the south, and the almost interminable prairies of the west, — that great valley, where, if all the nations of Europe were set down together, they could find ample subsistence, — the ejaculation involuntarily bursts forth, "WHY WERE THEY NOT COLONIZED BY MEN LIKE THE PILGRIM FATHERS?" — and as we reflect, how

different would have been the fortunes of this nation, had those States, — already so numerous, and still extending, circle beyond circle, been founded by men of high, heroic, Puritan mould ; — how different in the eye of a righteous Heaven, how different in the estimation of the wise and good of all contemporary nations, how different in the fortunes of that vast procession of the generations which are yet to rise up over all those wide expanses, and to follow each other to the end of time ; — as we reflect upon these things, it seems almost pious to repine at the ways of Providence ; resignation becomes laborious, and we are forced to choke down our murmurings at the will of Heaven ! Is it the solution of this deep mystery, that our ancestors did as much in their time, as it is ever given to one generation of men to accomplish, and have left to us and to our descendants the completion of the glorious work they began ?

[To be continued.]

---

#### SCHOOL BOOKS.

LECTURES DELIVERED BEFORE THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF INSTRUCTION, at Plymouth, August, 1846. Boston : William D. Ticknor & Co. 1847.

FIRST LESSONS IN HUMAN PHYSIOLOGY ; to which are added Brief Rules for Health. For the Use of Schools. By JOHN H. GRISCOM, M. D. Second Edition. New York : Roe Lockwood & Son. 1846.

BREAKFAST-TABLE SCIENCE ; or, the Philosophy of Common Things. For the Amusement and Instruction of Young Children. By J. H. WRIGHT. New York : Roe Lockwood & Son. 1846.

FIRST BOOK OF NATURAL HISTORY. By A. ACKERMAN. New York : Paine & Burgess. 1847.

AN INTRODUCTORY GEOGRAPHY ; designed for Children ; with a Quarto Atlas ; containing a Concise and Practical System of Geography for Common Schools, Academies, and Families ; designed as a Sequel to the First Book, and illustrated with thirty steel Maps and numerous Engravings. By ROSWELL C. SMITH, A. M. New York : Paine & Burgess. 1846.

MRS. BARBAULD'S LESSONS FOR CHILDREN, translated into French. Second Edition. New York : Roe Lockwood & Son. 1846.

---

*✉ All Communications, Newspapers, and Periodicals, for the Editor, to be addressed to West Newton, Mass.*

---

[THE COMMON SCHOOL JOURNAL is published semi-monthly, by WILLIAM B. FOWLE, No. 138½ Washington Street, up stairs, (opposite School Street,) Boston. HORACE MANN, Editor. Price, One Dollar a year, payable in advance.]